

Measuring age differences among different-sex couples: Across religions and 130 countries, men are older than their female partners.

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Abstract

Cross-national studies of age patterns among couples have tended to compare the ages at which men and women first marry, but few have analyzed age differences between current spouses or cohabiting partners (i.e. partner age gaps). We address this gap in the literature by using recent census and survey data to analyze age differences between current partners in 130 countries. Worldwide, men are an average of 4.2 years older than their wives or cohabiting partners. However, age gaps vary by region, ranging from 8.6 years in sub-Saharan Africa to 2.2 years in North America. The religious group with the largest age gap is Muslims (6.6 years), while the smallest age gap is seen among Jews (2.2 years). Differences between Muslims and non-Muslims remain even after controlling for country-level gender inequality and per-capita GDP.